

America's most conservative-friendly county is Williamson County: Horse farms, guitar-shaped pools and low taxes

By Aleksandra Kulczuga - The Daily Caller 03/19/10 at 2:05 AM



More than 175,000 lucky Tennesseans live nestled in the green rolling hills of what is, when adjusted for cost of living, America's wealthiest county. Home to vast horse farms and country music stars' getaways, bucolic Williamson County is located just south of Nashville, and tops The Daily Caller's list of America's 100 most conservative-friendly counties (click for slideshow of the top 20).

"There's more guitar-shaped swimming pools per square mile than anywhere else I can think of," said Billy Cerveney, a singer-songwriter who has lived in the area for 10 years.

This sprawling county is home to the cities of Brentwood, filled with mansions and manicured ranches, as well as Franklin, a storybook American small town. "Franklin," said Cerveney, is "country chic — it's where you'd go to find a very expensive distressed antique dining room table you've been looking for."

"It's not flashy though," he added. "I mean, Nashville was really excited when they got a Cheesecake Factory."

Residents are big on regular church attendance as well. "You can't swing a dead cat and not hit a church," said Cerveney. "It's very evangelical in that sense."

There is certainly a lot of money in and around Nashville. With favorable tax rates and a business-friendly environment, Williamson County has become a magnet for corporations, too.

Large multi-nationals have been drawn to the area, and Nissan North America recently relocated its headquarters here from California — helping the county achieve one of the lowest unemployment rates in the state. According to the county's bureau of economic development, 21 percent of the local economy is made up of entrepreneurs.

What may surprise some is that the largest employer is not in the music or horse industry, but rather health care. The state's second-largest hospital, the for-profit Community Health Systems is headquartered here.

The county prides itself on fiscal responsibility. "One of the things that I'm most proud of is that Williamson County is rated by Moody's as a AAA county. We're the only county in Tennessee to have that rating. And both of our cities have a AAA rating as well," said County Mayor Rogers Anderson.

"It's very important for us to balance our books, and nearly two-thirds of the operational budget goes to public education," he said. "From bow to stern, we're all held very accountable in our county."

"The driving force that people are looking here for is our public education system," said Anderson. "We have a 92-95 percent graduation rate in high school."

"We're very conservative, and we're proud of what the people here have," he continued. "We've had a very strong growing community, this is a great place to live."

"It is the best place on earth," said Representative Marsha Blackburn, a Republican, who has represented the area since 2003. "I have a list of bests that pertain to the 7th Congressional District — best BBQ, best fried pies, just a list of superlatives — and friendly people with the right values in the mix."

"There's a wonderfully diverse economic base, from financial services companies, Nissan, Mars, a good mix of the auto industry, health care, medical, construction. You have live entertainment, music labels, pro-sports — it's a beautiful microcosm."

"One thing that I think is quite unique about this area," she said, "is the community there is formed of people that love having a solid and enriching quality of life. They fully believe that it is important to give back more than you take. The community is incredibly generous, charity events are numerous. Our friends and neighbors seek out opportunities to give back."

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